

## From “*persona virtuosissima*” to “*membrum putridum et foetidum*”: A short account of Caravaggio’s stay in Malta

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A short account of Caravaggio’s stay in Malta, First published in 2005

“However tantalizing the connections that can be made between the life and the paintings, the two can never be entirely reconciled. Stubbornly, the paintings remain the paintings. The life is the life.”<sup>i</sup>

This is indeed true: the two can never be entirely reconciled. A classic example is matching Caravaggio’s *Beheading of St John the Baptist* with the fact that shortly after completing this masterpiece Caravaggio was to break the law once again and join others in a tumult which led to his arrest, imprisonment and escape from Malta. The *Beheading* permeates an inner peace, which is absent in the previous works of the master. At this point in his life he had opted to join the belligerent but essentially religious Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, better known as the Order of the Knights of Malta. One imagines him enwrapped in meditation, attempting to paint the *Beheading*.<sup>ii</sup> One could be mistakenly led to conclude that the artist’s new experience on the island of Malta had indeed changed Caravaggio the man. Could the signature with the blood of the beheaded Baptist be a prayer for forgiveness? To my mind it is more of a self-identification with the gory fate. The bloodied name is an autobiographical element: “This too can be my fate!”<sup>iii</sup>

Indeed the artist was terrorised that a hidden hand could at any time execute the *bando capitale*, which had been issued against him way back in May 1606.<sup>iv</sup> Those were indeed tragic and dreadful days. The date 28 May 1606 would remain impressed in Caravaggio’s mind. It was a normal day like any other. Caravaggio had a tiff with Ranuccio Tomassoni about a bet on a game of tennis<sup>v</sup>, though some say it involved a certain Fillide Melandroni whom Caravaggio used as a model and Ranuccio resorted to as an occasional substitute for his very young wife.<sup>vi</sup> Others even suspect there were some political undertones since it seems that Tomassoni sided with the Spanish faction and Caravaggio with the French.<sup>vii</sup>

Whatever the reason, Caravaggio had this time exceeded the limit. His previous brushes with the law varied in nature and seriousness: from throwing artichokes in the face of a waiter, Pietro Fusaccia, to attacking and wounding notary Mariano Pasqualino.<sup>viii</sup> But this time the matter was much more serious. In the midst of the brawl, Caravaggio’s sword thrust Tomassoni with a deadly blow.<sup>ix</sup> This time it was murder!

Caravaggio knew that his high-ranking contacts could not help him – at least not before the lapse of some time until the issue cooled down. So he quickly absconded from Rome. Immediately a *bando capitale* was issued against him, which meant that he could be arrested by any person anywhere and taken back to Roman justice. But he knew too well that often the captors preferred a short cut and beheaded the bandit, thus carrying with them only the head of the *bandito*. So a beheading henceforth became an

autobiographical event for Caravaggio and was no longer merely a subject for a painting, as in the *Beheading of Holofernes* and the *Medusa*. It was now a recurring fear which he harboured within him.<sup>x</sup>

The autobiographical nature of his later beheadings reach the apex in what is considered by the majority of writers to be Caravaggio's last work, namely the Borghese Gallery *David holding the head of Goliath*. The face of young David smacks of a self-portrait of the young Caravaggio. The head of Goliath with eyes and mouth wide open – a photograph of death – is undoubtedly a self-portrait. That is how the mature Caravaggio looked and felt.

Caravaggio sped to Paliano where he found refuge for a couple of months;<sup>xi</sup> from there he travelled to Naples, the capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which was then ruled by the Spanish. Caravaggio, who whilst in Rome seems to have sided with the French faction, was now feeling safer within the folds of the Spanish rule. His next stop was the island of Malta.

Those who believed that Caravaggio's stop in Naples was long enough to fit the several paintings which were thought to have been executed there, were quite shocked to find that Caravaggio was already in Malta on 12 July 1607. Exactly four hundred years ago! His testimony before the Maltese Inquisition Tribunal anchors his presence in Malta without any shadow of doubt.<sup>xii</sup>

A certain Paolo Cassar had reported to the local Inquisition that whilst he was with a group at the house of Fra Marchese, the latter who was talking to Caravaggio, turned to others and said that there had arrived on the galleys a painter who kept two wives, one at Mussumeli and another in Malta. Caravaggio was summoned to give his evidence on the matter. He stated that he never heard the alleged conversation. Even Fra Marchese was summoned and he too denied all this. The whole proceedings were a fiasco, in the sense that it was a whole waste of time but these proceedings are important because they unmistakably establish Caravaggio's presence in Malta.

Some writers tried to identify the bigamist artist – if ever there was one! One even identified him as Mario Minniti, Caravaggio's friend but the arguments brought forward are gratuitous.<sup>xiii</sup>

It is generally accepted that Caravaggio travelled to Malta on board a galley of the Order of the Knights of Malta. The galley was a new one and was captained by the newly appointed Captain General of the Galleys, Fra Fabrizio Sforza Colonna, a son of the Marchesa da Caravaggio, whose family assisted Caravaggio when he found himself in difficult straits. Notwithstanding this, Fra Fabrizio did not allow Caravaggio on board on his own initiative; he must have been formally authorised to do so.

The presence of the artist on the Order's galley must have been the culmination of an exchange of correspondence between the Grand Master and the Order's representatives in Naples. Indeed that is what happened a year before Caravaggio arrived in Malta although

the artist (unnamed in the correspondence) did not finally travel to Malta.<sup>xiv</sup> One year after Caravaggio's escape from Malta, we encounter a similar exchange of correspondence between Grand Master Wignacourt and Commendator Orsi and the Receiver of the Order in Naples, Caraffa, which ended successfully with the engagement of the Bolognese artist, Leonello Spada.<sup>xv</sup>

Unfortunately the specific correspondence for the engagement of Caravaggio has not been discovered yet. It is nonetheless assumed that Caravaggio was invited to travel to Malta. It should be equally assumed that although escaping from Roman Justice, Caravaggio did not travel *incognito*.

Naturally there must have been a person or persons who made the proper introduction or contact for Caravaggio to join the Order's service. Unfortunately, this is still virgin ground for researchers who can only offer their theory and nothing more.

Fabrizio Sforza Colonna, the Captain General of the Order's galleys, was the person who took Caravaggio on board to Malta but we do not know if he was also the catalyst for Caravaggio's Maltese stay. Fabrizio was imprisoned in Malta for four years in Fort St Elmo, though it seems that this imprisonment was rather lax.<sup>xvi</sup> He had committed a crime (not a murder<sup>xvii</sup>) but his respectable surname and the fact that he was a member of the Order of the Knights of Malta saved him from Roman justice; he was sent to Malta to be tried and punished by the Order. The criminal proceedings took too long and were then summarily concluded.<sup>xviii</sup> The judgement was subsequently considered null but the Pope imposed on him a three-year *relegazione* in Malta rather than re-commence the very lengthy proceedings.<sup>xix</sup> As soon as this term expired, he was appointed Captain General.

As I have already stated, Fabrizio would not have taken Caravaggio on board unless specifically authorised to do so. He must have been still sore from his long punishment to dare take any chances. He had been in Malta for years and after his imprisonment had immediately left Malta to bring the Order's new galley.

Fabrizio's mother, Marchesa Costanza di Caravaggio, knew Michelangelo Merisi well and is believed to have assisted him several times. She and her late husband had strong ties with Caravaggio's father, Fermo, and Lucia, his mother. It has been considered by many authors that the contact was through Caravaggio's father, rather than the mother, since his father is said to have worked for the Marchese. However, the mother's side (Aratori) provided a strong, if not stronger contact. In fact Caravaggio's aunt, Margherita Aratori, was the wet nurse of Fabrizio and his brothers. Furthermore, his sister, Caterina, was the wet nurse of the children of Fabrizio's brother, Muzio.<sup>xx</sup>

One must add that the Marchesa held a correspondence with Grand Master Wignacourt, but this concerned her son for whom she pleaded forgiveness or, at least, good treatment. Wignacourt expressed his esteem toward Fabrizio and soon proved this by appointing him Captain General immediately after the imprisonment. Marchesa Costanza Sforza Colonna is traceable in all the localities where Caravaggio resided. She was in Rome when Caravaggio resided there. She was in Naples when Caravaggio was there. She was

also in contact with Caravaggio in his last months since she had hosted him in her palace at Chiaia, Naples.<sup>xxi</sup> The Marchesa is a possible go-between.

The go-between(s) must have been close enough or had sufficient weight to convince the Grand Master that the strenuous task to obtain all authorisations to accept Caravaggio could be worth it. As we shall see, the Grand Master was well aware of the artist's murderous past and his escape from Rome.

Ottavio Costa, the papal banker and early collector of Caravaggio's works, has also been indicated as a possible intermediary. His second wife was a Malaspina.<sup>xxii</sup> He had also purchased property in Malta for the use of his son, Antonio, who was a member of the Order.<sup>xxiii</sup> He was particularly close to Ippolito Malaspina. It is possible that Costa introduced Caravaggio to Ippolito Malaspina who in turn recommended him to the Grand Master.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Fra Ippolito Malaspina is another contender, and may I add, with excellent credentials. Throughout his career in the Order he held several high posts, such as Auditor of Accounts, Commissioner for the Poor, Orphans and Widows, Counsellor of the Langue of Italy, prior to Hungary, admiral, Commissioner for Arms and Bailiff of San Giovanni a Mare, Naples. He enjoyed Wignacourt's deep friendship and esteem and had strongly supported the election of Alof de Wignacourt for Grand Master.<sup>xxv</sup>

Five months before Caravaggio's arrival in Malta, Malaspina had expressed his wish to come to Malta. The Grand Master was thrilled and exhorted Fabrizio Sforza Colonna to "offer him all that is necessary for his embarkation".<sup>xxvi</sup> Possibly Malaspina who like Caravaggio was in Naples at that time, travelled with the artist on the same galley to Malta. Caravaggio's *St Jerome Writing* (in St John's Church, Valletta, Malta) includes the coat of arms of Malaspina. It is quite possible and probable that this painting was a form of thanks from Caravaggio to Malaspina for the latter's assistance in the artist's travel to Malta and perhaps also for joining the Order. Malaspina is buried in the chapel of Italy in St John's Church, Valletta.

Another possible intermediary was Francesco dell'Antella. Francesco was a good friend and confidant of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt besides having been his secretary from 1601 to 1611. He was also a sort of artistic adviser and was involved in the negotiations to obtain a papal brief to exceptionally allow Caravaggio's entry in the Order. He was in the loop when an unnamed artist was being engaged with the Order a year before Caravaggio's arrival. He was also in the loop when, a year after Caravaggio's escape from Malta, the Order engaged Leonello Spada. I feel it safe to assume that he was also involved when Caravaggio was being lured to Malta.

Francesco dell'Antella was the proud owner of Caravaggio's *Sleeping Cupid*, which Caravaggio painted in Malta; he was certainly a great admirer of this artist. This painting may be a form of gratitude for dell'Antella's involvement.

Was dell'Antella so close to the Grand Master? Undoubtedly the Grand Master considered him a faithful friend; this becomes evident in the very dramatic episode when this knight killed the Grand Master's troublesome nephew, Fra Henri de Lancry de Bains, in a duel in 1611. The Grand Master knew his nephew well enough to believe in dell'Antella's uprightness.

Very soon after the tragic incident, Francesco dell'Antella left Malta on 16 July 1611. The Grand Master's strong faith in dell'Antella did not waiver, as is borne out in his correspondence, which shows that he did not wish his secretary to resign. He wrote to Cosimo II of Florence on 14 July 1611:

“My secretary, Commendatore Fra Francesco dell'Antella has, because of a sudden accident and without fault on his part, requested licence to return to his homeland, which request I have decided to allow thus giving precedence to his wish rather than mine, even though the loss of one of my most long standing faithful and principal servant has caused me great aggravation ...”<sup>xxvii</sup>

Wignacourt recommended dell'Antella to Cosimo II and pleaded him to treat dell'Antella as a knight whom he greatly esteemed and loved. (“Cavaliere da me molto stimato e amato”)

The facts of this unfortunate incident were related in a letter dated 16 July 1611, sent from Malta by Fra Francesco Buonarrotti to his brother Michelangelo Buonarrotti the Younger in Florence.

“Our Commendatore Antella is returning there (*to Florence*) to rest. Everyone here is saddened by his departure. The cause of his sudden departure is that some days ago he was attacked during the night without any reason or cause by a nephew of the Grand Master. As a result the Signor Commendatore suffered some wounds, one in his head and one in his hand, though of slight nature and is almost healed. The nephew of the Grand Master suffered eight or ten wounds and is in danger of losing his life. After this incident he asked licence to leave and now departs of his own free will with the support of the Grand Master and of everyone. Thus we Florentines lose a protector with the Grand Master...”<sup>xxviii</sup>

Wignacourt retained contact with dell'Antella and steadfastly defended his good name. He also followed the negotiations for peace with the de Bains family until on 23 September 1613 he finally informed the faithful ex-secretary that the de Bains family had declared peace and so he “would not be sought by the family through *querela* or suit whether in Malta or elsewhere...”<sup>xxix</sup>

Other possible negotiators have been suggested, namely families associated with the Pio Monte della Misericordia, such as the family Sersale, the D'Alessandro family and Piscicello family.<sup>xxx</sup> Fra Fabio Piscicello was a prominent member of the Order in Naples; he was very close to Wignacourt and enjoyed the high esteem of the Grand Master. The Capece family were receivers of the Order in Naples. It was Giovanni Andrea Capece who organised and managed the galley's departure from Naples to Malta.

The possibility I conjecture is the following:

The Sforza Colonna or Ottavio Costa had perhaps introduced Caravaggio to Malaspina, the Prior of Naples who lived in Fosdinovo. Malaspina, in turn, could have contacted Grand Master Wignacourt. The Grand Master would have delegated a good part of the management of the affair to Francesco dell'Antella who would have maintained contact with Malaspina. Fabrizio Sforza Colonna was the man who was directed by Wignacourt to take Caravaggio on board the galleys on his return to Malta in July 1607. Perhaps Malaspina joined Fabrizio's galley from Naples and travelled with Caravaggio.

It is undoubted that Caravaggio's murderous past was known to the Order. In fact the fatal duel was widely reported in several *avvisi* in Rome and the Order was well represented in the Eternal City, where it had several ears, official and unofficial.

This begs some natural queries: Why did Caravaggio, who was escaping from Roman justice, choose Malta, which was ruled by an Order that owed absolute fealty to the Pope in Rome? Could the Grand Master have tried to engage Caravaggio behind the Pope's back? Could it be that the Grand Master was unaware of Caravaggio's murder of Tomassoni?

I do not believe Caravaggio chose Malta. It was Malta who chose Caravaggio. Grand Master Wignacourt was then riding high. Times were affluent and the economy of the island was blooming. New palaces and churches were being built and this necessitated artists to embellish them. The 1590s had sowed great hardship all around the Central Mediterranean. Famine, the plague and repeated Muslim attacks caused the loss of 20% of the Maltese population. But now matters had taken a turn towards the right direction.

An artist of some significance who came to Malta before Caravaggio, was Filippo Paladini (c.1544-1616). In 1586, this artist was found guilty of armed assault and condemned to the galleys for three years. Perhaps through the influence of good connections, he was pardoned but shortly after, in 1587, he was again involved in a brawl in Piazza Santa Croce, Florence, and though he was sentenced to flogging and payment of a sum of money, he was sent instead to work on a galley and in this manner came to Malta in 1588. Grand Master Verdala snatched this unique occasion, released him and immediately the artist found himself busy working on several commissions.

Paladini was kept rather busy. He painted frescoes for the chapel of the Grand Master in the Valletta palace and for the main hall of the Verdala palace in Rabat. He also painted several canvases for churches and probably had some assistants. Through the intercession of the Order, he was pardoned and returned to Florence from where he soon travelled south. He lived in Sicily from 1601 where he died in circa 1616. He could have again visited Malta around 1611, after Caravaggio's death.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Hence the Order was not new to receiving artists who were serving punishment, providing them with work, and, as in the case of Paladini, actually assisting them to

obtain pardon. The idea of receiving the condemned Caravaggio was not so novel an initiative, though circumstances differed.

As I have already said, Malta required an artist urgently. Caravaggio was close by and available. The deal was clinched.

It is impossible that Grand Master Wignacourt tried pulling a fast one on the Pope. He would never have dared! The Pope must have been aware of Caravaggio's visit to Malta just as much as he was aware of the artist's presence in Naples where he worked openly. Not only that; the Pope entered a correspondence with the Grand Master on something which was extraordinarily exceptional.

Just five and a half months after Caravaggio's arrival in Malta, the Grand Master commenced a correspondence with the Pope. On 29 December 1607 he wrote to the Order's ambassador to the Holy See, Fra Francesco Lomellini.<sup>xxxii</sup> He started by emphasising how strict he himself had been against any breach of the rules of entry into the Order. He had also opposed some attempts to use the Pope's influence in undeserving cases. However, he was now faced with the chance of allowing into the Order "a person of great virtue and of most honourable qualities and custom..." (*"una persona virtuosissima e di honoratissime qualita`..."*). He therefore urged his ambassador to plead with the Pope "to concede a brief empowering us **for one time only** (*my emphasis*) to decorate with the...Magisterial Habit a person...without the obligation of proofs...notwithstanding that he has committed murder in a brawl..." How on earth a person who has killed in a brawl could be considered a person of honourable qualities beats me, but the Grand Master must have believed otherwise.

The Grand Master also urged his ambassador Lomellini to request the good service of Giacomo Bosio, who was the Order's renowned historian and also an ambassador of the Order to the Holy See. To avoid any unhappy consequences, the Master also wrote to Giacomo Bosio himself, urging his assistance in the matter. The Grand Master then referred him to what Vice Chancellor Fra Giovanni Ottone Bosio and Commendatore dell'Antella would write to him separately on the issue.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

One immediately notices the complete absence of Caravaggio's name in the letter. Yet the exceptional nature and uniqueness of the request must have had Caravaggio as the object and subject of this correspondence since Caravaggio's entry in the Order followed within a few months. Caravaggio's name could have been indicated in the letters of dell'Antella and Giovanni Ottone Bosio, which unfortunately have not been traced yet.

Caravaggio could only become a knight after completing a one-year stay in Malta. Why did the Grand Master begin the process so early? I tend to believe that the Grand Master wanted to clinch the deal with Caravaggio as early as possible. Was this a condition when Caravaggio was originally lured to Malta? We simply do not know but it would not be far-fetched to believe it was.

The behind-the-scene negotiations must have been successful since we soon see the Grand Master writing to the Pope. We must assume that he would only have done so when he was sure of a positive outcome. The Grand Master's first letter (undated) was internally approved by the Pope on 7 February 1608.<sup>xxxiv</sup> "Wishing to honour some virtuous and deserving persons ..." the Grand Master begged His Holiness to grant him by way of Brief "the authority and power for **one time only** (*my emphasis*) to decorate and adorn with the Habit of a Magistral Knight, two persons favoured and to be nominated by him, despite the fact that one of the two had committed homicide in a brawl..." He was quick to beg this request "as an exceptional favour because of his desire to honour such virtuous and deserving persons."

So from one person, the request was inflated to include two persons, but the murderer in a brawl remained included. The identity of the second person is still unknown. Some have suggested Count de Brie<sup>xxxv</sup> but in that case the Pope had only requested entry into the Order before the statutory one-year novitiate. There was no need to request entry in the Order without the obligation of proofs.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

I suspect that the second person was Rome's suggestion to the Grand Master who could have been directed to include a reference to the second person in the Magistral letter to the Pope. It could be that when the Grand Master was given the green light to write to the Pope, he was directed from Rome to incorporate a second person in this exceptional plea.

Though this letter was internally approved on 7 February 1608, the formal answer was dated 15 February 1608. Only the copy of this letter (found in the Vatican Secret Archives) has been traced to date. It is a draft copy and includes some amendments and marginal addenda.

In his answer, the Pope accepted the Grand Master's request, provided there were no other legal impediments. In the lengthy and all inclusive letter, the Pope expressly waived all prohibitions "for this instance only..." Once again the exceptional nature of the permit is emphasised.

The main stumbling block for the murderer arose from Statute 12 in the *Reception of Brothers*, which expressly stated that: "Neither can any body that had committed murder, or led a wicked and debauched life in the world be admitted to profession." This statute, introduced by Grand Master Anthony Fluvian, was indeed a stubborn stumbling block which required nothing less than papal intervention.

The Pope wrote:

"To our beloved Aloph Wignacourt Grand Master of the Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem

Pope Paul the Fifth.

Beloved son, greetings. The merits of your special devotion to Us and to the Holy See induce Us to favour you by acceding to such requests as will enable you to



show gratitude to those who pay their obeisance to you or whom you hold in grace and favour. Wherefore inclining to the requests submitted to Us on your behalf, in virtue of this [brief] and by our Apostolic Authority we impart and grant to you authority to receive as Brothers of the grade of Magistral Knights two persons favoured by you, who are to be selected and nominated by you, even if one of them has committed murder in a brawl, as long as there is no other legal impediment, and to present to them the habits of Brothers of the grade of Magistral Knights. [We further authorise you] to bestow on them the [right] of using, acquiring, obtaining and enjoying all and sundry favours, honours, prerogatives, privileges and positions which are at present or may hereafter be used, acquired, obtained and enjoyed by other Brothers of the grade of Magistral Knights in any way whatsoever by whatever rights, usages, customs or by other means without any distinction. Despite the Constitutions, Apostolic ordinances and statutes, customs, usages and orders of the Chapter General of the said [Order of the] Hospital even if these are affirmed on oath, by Apostolic confirmation or by any other binding means, especially those in which it is expressly provided that any such persons who committed murder cannot be received in the said [Order of the] Hospital nor can those Brothers of the grade of Magistral Knights be allowed to wear this habit. [Despite the] usages, practices, privileges and concessions and Apostolic letters granted, confirmed and approved in favour of the said [Order of the] Hospital and the Grand Master, Convent, Brothers and Superiors and other persons, in whatever way or form or with whatever limitations on matters which are subject to be limited, or any other clauses or decrees, in general or in particular, even if these are expressed in terms that render them more effective or uncommon or that declare them to be invalid. Taking into consideration the contents of all and sundry of these [stipulations] fully and sufficiently expressed and inserted word for word, by virtue of this present [brief] we expressly and specially waive them for this instance only, their validity remaining in force at all other times. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary. Given at St Mark's under the seal of the Fisherman on 15 February 1608 in [our] third year.

If it pleases the Holy Father, [this brief] may be released.

Cardinal L. Blanchectus on behalf of the prefect, the Lord Cardinal Aldobrandinus.

Scipio Cobellutius<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Why did the Pope issue this Brief in this mysterious manner instead of pardoning Caravaggio publicly? The reason could very well be that the Tomassoni family, who though not belonging to the upper strata of society held some very high ranking contacts, had not made peace. "*Fare la pace*" or "*ottenere la pace*" involved a pardon by the victim's family.

Once the papal waiver was received the only other rule to comply with was the requisite of a one-year stay in the Convent (in this case, Malta). And sure enough on 14 July 1608, one year and two days after Caravaggio's arrival in Malta, Caravaggio was admitted into the Order. No time was lost on this score, which makes me believe that the knighthood

was somehow included in the original negotiations for Caravaggio to come to Malta. I would not think a firm promise was given; indeed it could not have been given at such an early stage in view of the murder being a main stumbling block. But a determination to try hard could very well have been expressed.

The long awaited day arrived: 14 July 1608.

“Reception of the Honourable Michel Angelo da Caravaggio as Brother and Knight of Obedience.

Brother Alof de Wignacourt, by the grace of God, Master of the Sacred Hospital of St John and Guardian of the Poor of Christ to one and all.

Whereas it behoves the leaders and rulers of commonweals to prove their benevolence by advancing men, not only on account of their noble birth but also on account of their art and science whatever it may be, so that human talent, in the hope of reward and honour, may apply itself to praiseworthy studies with all its might;

And whereas the Honourable Michael Angelo, native of the town Carraca in Lombardy called Caravaggio in the vernacular, having landed in this city and burning with zeal for the Order, has recently communicated to us his fervent wish to be adorned with the habit and insigna of our Knightly Order;

Therefore, we wish to gratify the desire of this excellent painter, so that our Island Malta, and our Order may at last glory in the adopted disciple and citizen with no less pride than the island of Kos (also within our jurisdiction) extols her Apelles; and that, should we compare him to the more recent (artists) of our age, we may not afterwards be envious of the artistic excellence of some other man, outstanding in his art, whose name and brush are equally important. Wishing then, to extend to him special grace and favour, we have decided to induct him into our Order and to adorn him with the insigna of our Order and the Belt of Knighthood. Therefore, (complying with) the pious wish of the aforesaid Michel Angelo, we receive and admit him, by the grace of God Almighty and by a papal authorisation especially granted to us for the purpose, to the rank of the Brethren and Knights known as Brethren and Knights of Obedience *et cetera*. We further decree that he enjoy all and sundry of the privileges *et cetera*. Enjoining *et cetera* Barring statutory obstacles *et cetera* In witness thereof we have affixed our leaden Magistral seal *et cetera* Enacted in Malta, on the fourteenth day of July, sixteen hundred and eight.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

It has been sometimes hotly debated whether Caravaggio stayed in Malta uninterruptedly for one year or whether he travelled to Naples and back. Those who opt for the latter, do so to comfortably fit all the paintings which are believed to have been executed in Naples. In that case there would be three Neapolitan stays: one before, one during and one after Caravaggio’s stay in Malta.

Those who favour the view that Caravaggio did not visit Naples during his stay in Malta base their argument on Rule 28, Title II, *Of the Reception of the Brothers*, of the Statutes of the Order. This rule, which was enacted under Grand Master Hugh De Loubenx Verdale stated:

“We enact, that for the future nobody shall receive the habit in the convent unless he has lived there a whole year, that his morals, his manner of life, and his capacity may be known. During this year, he shall enjoy his privilege of seniority and residence, and shall have his table and his pay; otherwise his standing shall not be reckoned from that year.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

This indicates a non-interrupted full year stay in Malta (the convent). Caravaggio arrived in Malta on 12 July 1607 and was knighted on 14 July 1608, almost exactly one year later, which means that he could not have left Malta during this period.

This rule differs from another rule where an interrupted residence is specifically allowed:

“It is not fitting that such as are not acquainted with the constitutions and statutes of the order, and are not versed in the affairs of it, should be put in the office of judges: and therefore we enact, that such brothers as have not resided, either at once, or at different times, the space of eight whole years in the convent, shall not be admitted for the future to the general chapter: nor shall any body be allowed to sit in any other council whatever, where regulations are to be made about the affairs of the order, unless he has resided five years complete, except the brothers of the venerable languages of England and Germany.”<sup>xl</sup> (*Underlining by the author*)

The blind insistence on the one-year residence rule is debatable. Indeed there is a very important fact that seems to have escaped attention. One of the amendments thereto was made during the reign of Grand Master Wignacout himself by the sixteen lords appointed for the revision of the statute with the consent of the Council, but pronounced and published in a meeting of the General Chapter in 1631 under Grand Master De Paule.

Rule 12, Title II, *Of the Reception of Brothers*, of the revised Statutes states:

“They (*i.e. the sixteen lords*) have decreed and ordained that according to the twenty first article of the title of the reception of brothers, (*which was enacted under Grand Master L’Isle Adam and which stated that after making proof of the requisites of entry, they shall be sent to the convent with authentic proofs and were forbidden strictly to be admitted as brother knight except in the convent*) no brother knight, conventual chaplain or servant of arms shall be received out of the convent, notwithstanding any dispensation whatsoever; that they shall be all obliged to pass a year’s noviceship there, and receive the habit and make their profession there in the usual forms: declaring everything null that shall be made contrary to the present statute, and that the brother knights, chaplains and servants of the arms that receive the habit out of the convent, shall have no right to any standing on that account.

They (*i.e. the sixteen lords*) likewise revoked all faculties of reservation, for receiving the habit, and going through the noviceship and making profession out of the convent, either granted or to be granted, by the present chapter or by subsequent ones, to all novices and others that have been or shall be admitted into our order, except which has been granted to Don Michel de la Cueva, natural and legitimate son of the most illustrious and excellent lord the duke of Albuquerque, viceroy of Sicily.”<sup>xli</sup> (*Underlining by the author; italicised words inserted for explanation*)

The underlined parts of the rule indicate that there were exceptions to the rule of a year's stay in the convent. Thus, the rule establishing the one-year stay in Malta (the convent) should not be blindly relied upon as some watertight argument in favour of the theory that Caravaggio did not leave Malta during his stay in the island. Exceptions were made; so much so, that it was felt necessary to stop the then current practice of allowing exceptions. It is true that no documentary evidence proving exemption in relation to Caravaggio has been found to date but this should not be conclusively interpreted that there were none. Indeed we have not yet discovered documents relating to some very important incidents that surely occurred.

I feel one should allow space for a theoretical possibility that Caravaggio could have travelled to Naples during his stay in Malta, but one should consider this as a possibility that still needs to be proved. Certainly it cannot be summarily discarded as impossible on the basis of the one-year stay rule.

So Caravaggio became Fra Michelangelo Merisi. It is often incorrectly believed that the knighthood certainly took place in the Oratory of St John's Church. It could indeed have been the case but the document on Caravaggio's entry in the Order does not indicate the location of the ceremony.

Though Wignacourt's letter to the Pope and the Pope's answer thereto mention appointment as a Knight of Magistral Grace, Caravaggio's admission document speaks of a Knight of Obedience.

The Reception Document specially mentions that the new entrant was an "excellent painter"; indeed that was the sole reason for Caravaggio's entry. The document somewhat inexactly states that Caravaggio had expressed his wish to enter the Order "recently". I firmly believe it was a long expected honour. It also mentions the special papal authorisation.

The entry in the Order attracted a *passaggio*, passage fee, which involved a payment of a sum of money, transfer of land, delivery of goods or could take some other form. Thus for example an artist could donate a work of art (as was the case with Antoine Favray). This fee was also due by those who attained knighthood in virtue of a papal brief.

"We enact that such as shall make their profession in our Order, in virtue of a papal brief, shall pay their passage as well." <sup>xlii</sup>

Caravaggio's *passaggio* might well have been the *Beheading of St John the Baptist*. The artist's unique signature *f.Michelangelo* – alas with the name partly lost by time – could be an assertion of his newly acquired knighthood: f(ra) Michelangelo.

Some writers state that during his stay in Malta, Caravaggio also participated in a caravan. They erroneously assume that participation in caravans was a necessary requisite during the novitiate period. In reality, caravans were important for advancement within the Order but were not a requisite to attain knighthood. <sup>xliii</sup>

A caravan meant a period of at least one-year service on a ship-of-the-line, or six months on the much less comfortable galleys. Ignoring the one-year period for obvious reasons, the minimum length of time (six months) too annuls the possibility of Caravaggio joining a caravan since one would then have to conclude that Caravaggio managed to complete all his Malta paintings in such an impossibly short period of time.

The Order was a belligerent Order but it was also essentially a religious one. And therefore, as such, Caravaggio was bound to fulfil several religious obligations, such as receiving the Eucharist on appointed days. The troublesome Merisi, now Fra Michelangelo, was bound by the rules of the Order to say the Lord's prayer one hundred and fifty times a day.<sup>xliv</sup> This was the man who was guilty of murder; this was the man who continuously feared a vengeance; this was the man who feared his own beheading.

Unfortunately, though Caravaggio could have had some good intentions, he had a chronic inability to steer away from trouble.

Giovanni Baglione (1571-1644) informs us: "There (in Malta) he had some sort of dispute with a knight of Justice, to whom Michelangelo made some kind of effrontery and was thus imprisoned..."<sup>xlv</sup>

Similarly Giovanni Pietro Bellori wrote in 1672: "Owing to an inopportune quarrel he had with a most noble knight, he was sent to prison..."<sup>xlvi</sup>

Francesco Susinno wrote in 1724: "... one day he dared compete with some knights and having affronted a Knight of Justice, Wignacourt was forced to imprison him in a castle."<sup>xlvii</sup>

Since no documentation was discovered, several authors doubted the veracity of this information whilst others stated that the real reason for his imprisonment was undoubtedly the "unmentionable sin" i.e. sodomy. Many a story was invented and concocted until the document was unearthed in 2002, confirming the old writings: there was indeed a quarrel with a noble knight.<sup>xlviii</sup>

On 19 August 1608, a Criminal Commission was formed to investigate a nocturnal tumult that had taken place the night before, during which the door of Fra Prospero Coppini was smashed and a noble knight, Fra Giovanni Rodomonte Roero, Conte della Vezza, was wounded.<sup>xlix</sup> A week later, on 27 August 1608, the Criminal Commission presented its first report to the Venerable Council, which in turn requested further investigation against Caravaggio and others. It transpired that the ringleader was Fra Giovanni Pietro de Ponte; the other members of the gang were two novices, Giovanni Pecci and Francesco Benzo, and three knights, namely Fra Giulio Accarigi (a hardened trouble maker<sup>1</sup>), Fra Giovanni Battista Scaravello, and finally Fra Michelangelo Merisi.

Fra Giovanni Rodomonte Roero was an innocent victim since no action was taken against him. Fra Prospero Coppini was a Conventual Chaplain and the organist of St John's

Conventual Church; he seems to have been innocent in this instance but it transpires that he was not free from very serious breaches of the law. In fact in 1590, he and Fra Raffaele de' Pazzi had murdered and then plundered Fra Paolo Mozzi. Both Coppini and de' Pazzi were defrocked but were re-accepted within the Order (not such an exceptional fact!) two years later in 1592.<sup>li</sup>

In 2004, a sizeable graffito was discovered on a panel of the organ of St John's Church which was transferred to the Oratory of the same church during Mattia Preti's redecoration in the 1660's. The graffito reads F. PROSPERO COPPINI 1598. (or is it 1588?) Since then, Caravaggio's signature on the *Beheading* and Coppini's scratched name on the organ at the opposite end of the Oratory have silently shared the same room.<sup>lii</sup>

Caravaggio was arrested and imprisoned in Fort St Angelo pending trial. The next thing we know is that he had escaped from prison and from Malta. A Special Criminal Commission was convened on 6 October 1608 to examine how Caravaggio had managed to escape from prison, and summon him to appear before the Criminal Commission.

“October 1608. The complaint was heard of Lord Brother Hieronymus Varayz, Procurator of the Treasury of the Order, made against brother Michael Angelo Merisi de Caravaggio, who while detained in the prison of the Castle of St Angelo, fled from it without permission of the most illustrious and most Reverend Lord, the Grand Master, and departed secretly from the district, against the form of the statute 13 concerning prohibitions and penalties. The most illustrious and most exalted Lord the Grand Master and the Venerable Council commissioned the Lord Brothers Johannes Honoret and Blasius Suarez that...through the agency of the Master Shieldbearer they should see that all due diligence is shown in searching for the said Brother Michael Angelo and in summoning him to appear, and should gather information about the nature of his flight...and should report it to the Venerable Council.”<sup>liiii</sup>

We do not know exactly where Caravaggio was imprisoned in Fort St Angelo. It has been sometimes stated that Caravaggio was imprisoned in the *guva*, which is a bell shaped chamber hewn out of rock; it is 3.5 metres deep with a diameter of 3.5 to 4.5 metres. This was indeed a harsh confinement; no wonder it was referred to as “*aspero carcere*”. Caravaggio's confinement is referred to in the contemporary document as “*in carceribus castri Sancti Angeli*” (in the prison of Fort St Angelo). The word *guva* does not feature.

This place has been sometimes mistakenly called an *oubliette*. It could hardly be the case of a place where prisoners were confined and forgotten. Indeed the place is small and is centrally located within the Fort.

On the walls of this underground cell one can to this day read several graffiti, some even dating from well before Caravaggio's imprisonment. These writings form an interesting array of prayers and deprecations scratched by those poor occupiers who either saw in God the final abode or whose spirits were torn in utter despair. Caravaggio's name does not feature.<sup>liv</sup>

There were other prisons in Fort St Angelo. Records sometimes refer to the Tower in St Angelo as a prison but this has not been located with certainty. The large room beneath the Captain's house could also have been used as dungeons and some single cells in the Captain's house could have served as prisons.<sup>lv</sup> Imprisonment in the Fort could at times mean anywhere within the Fort but not in any particular cell.<sup>lvi</sup>

In all probability, Caravaggio was not kept in the *guva* since it seems that this place was used only for knights who were tried and found guilty. Caravaggio was still awaiting trial.

It is interesting to note that escape from Malta by sea was not such an uncommon feat. One finds several reports of slaves absconding from Malta. Their number had escalated so much that in 1602 the Order decided to build a ravelin at Gallows Point to deter escape by boat. The construction, however, was built much later, in 1629. Furthermore, there exist several records of imprisoned knights escaping from the Castle of St Angelo.<sup>lvii</sup>

The mere fact of leaving Malta without the necessary authorisation attracted the harsh punishment of defrocking or expulsion from the Order. We do not know how Caravaggio managed to escape. It arises from a document (to be referred to later) that he escaped by use of ropes.

Somebody must have provided him with these ropes, and perhaps also kept watch during the daring escape. Outside help was essential to leave the prison; it was more so essential to leave the island by sea. Who helped Caravaggio escape? The honest answer is: we simply do not know! I believe that more than one person acted behind the scene. Caravaggio needed help to escape from the cell, avoid the guards, scale the prison walls, board a ship without a permit, and leave the island. More than one accomplice is required for all this unless a very important person merely ordered it and it was allowed to happen.

Suspicion or even outright accusation has concentrated on Grand Master Wignacourt himself. "Everything points to one explanation: connivance, and at the highest level...He [Wignacourt] it was...who provided rope, boat and passport and prevented any official hue and cry!"<sup>lviii</sup>

Before the discovery of Wignacourt's petition to the Pope to allow the entry of an unnamed person (Caravaggio) into the Order in spite of a murderous past, it was perhaps justified to believe that Wignacourt was unaware of Caravaggio's precedent and that when he came to know of Caravaggio's murder of Ranuccio, he must have felt compelled to save face by assisting or orchestrating the artist's escape. One could have argued also that Wignacourt was aware of the artist's past but kept this information secret until something happened and the damning incident surfaced, so he had to save face and assist in the escape.

The papal brief has, however, rendered matters more complicated. If, as I firmly believe, Caravaggio is the unnamed person in the Grand Master's request to the Pope, this would

mean that Wignacourt knew of Caravaggio's murder and had not only refrained from retaining this information secret but also asked for a special dispensation from the Pope.

I rule out the probability or indeed the possibility that the Pope would have granted such a special dispensation without even verbally enquiring the name of the person for whom the special papal dispensation was sought. The Pope must have been aware that Wignacourt was referring to Caravaggio. If so, why did the Pope avoid granting a direct pardon to Caravaggio, thus settling the matter, rather than issuing a brief in such a roundabout manner? Possibly, since a peace accord was not yet reached with the Tomassoni family, the Pope did not desire to push matters.

The Tomassoni family was somewhat well connected.<sup>lix</sup> It is also possible therefore that the Pope wanted to keep Caravaggio's name secret from the several cardinals or curia officials with whom the Tomassoni family had strong connections. Caravaggio could have been an uncomfortable spoke in the wheel of diplomacy.

If all this is true, why did Caravaggio escape from Malta? If the Pope and the Grand Master were on his side, why did he escape? He could have suffered imprisonment to later return to the society in Malta that had favoured him so much. The answer to this could be that Caravaggio was not aware of the fact that the Pope had actually supported his entry into the Order. But this is highly unlikely. Fear could have been the answer; fear of vengeance, which would have been that much easier after losing the protection of the Order.

There still remain other important questions. If the Grand Master knew that the Pope was aware that the special authorisation was being requested for Caravaggio, why would the Grand Master actually help the artist to escape from Malta? If Caravaggio's part in the August tumult in Malta which triggered the imprisonment would have caused defrocking and expulsion from the Order, why would the Grand Master have helped Caravaggio to escape from Malta to then trigger the same penalty of defrocking for having escaped from Malta? These queries tend to deny any involvement of the Grand Master in the artist's escape.

Some have ventured to believe that the Pope could have asked for Caravaggio's return to Roman justice. My counter-argument is the Pope would have refused his special authorisation from the outset rather than recall Caravaggio to Rome after issuing the exceptional brief. The order would not have handed Caravaggio before defrocking him. In 1602 a certain Fra Paolo Girolamo Corio had committed a homicide in Milan. When the Pope demanded the knight in Rome, Wignacourt explained to the Pope that he could not surrender a knight to another jurisdiction and informed him that the Order was in turmoil because of this. The Grand Master referred the Pope to the latter's surrender of Fra Fabrizio Sforza for trial by the Order and hence expressed his hope that in this case too an equitable solution would be resorted to. The Pope withdrew his claim.

Undoubtedly Caravaggio was terrified. He feared a return to Rome or feared that his defrocking would divest him of the protection offered to him through his knighthood.



Whatever it was, Caravaggio could not risk awaiting judgement in Malta. He felt he had to act and act fast.

Caravaggio's next locations were Syracuse, Messina, Palermo and then Naples. He would then leave for Rome after hearing that he was about to be pardoned. Two years after his escape from Malta, Caravaggio died. Every place he visited he carried in his heart the fear of being attacked. He ached for the pardon from Rome for the murder of Tomassoni.

Meanwhile in Malta matters followed their normal course. On 27 November 1608 a Council meeting was convened and heard that Caravaggio had indeed escaped from Malta in breach of Statute 13 Title XVIII, *Of Prohibitions and Penalties*.<sup>lx</sup> There was no other alternative but to summon a meeting of the Public Assembly for the unavoidable next step: defrocking! In fact statute 13 stated:

None of our brothers, what dignity soever he enjoys, is allowed to go out of the convent, either openly or secretly, without an express leave from the master in writing. Such as do otherwise, shall be immediately deprived of the Habit and of their commanderies and benefices."<sup>lxi</sup>

So Caravaggio's part in the August tumult was not even considered. His expulsion lay fairly and squarely on his unauthorised leaving from Malta.

The fateful day arrived: 1 December 1608. The Public Assembly met in all solemnity in the Oratory of St John's Church, in Caravaggio's absence but in the presence of Caravaggio's masterpiece *The Beheading of St John the Baptist*.

"1 December 1608. A General Assembly was summoned of the Venerable Bailiffs, the Priors, the Preceptors and the Brothers in the Church and Oratory of St John our Patron, at the sound of the bell, according to the ancient and praiseworthy custom of the Holy Order of St John of Jerusalem...the information inspection and carefully read against Michael Angelo Merisi de Caravaggio. And it being determined that he, while detained in the prison of the Castle of St Angelo, did escape by means of ropes from the said prison and without permission... did depart from the district; and moreover the report of the Lord Shield-Bearer being inspected and understood, he having performed the usual observance in seeking out Brother Michael Angelo Merisi de Caravaggio, to wit, summonses and proclamations throughout public places of the district, which summonses the Lord Shield-Bearer himself or his deputy...has repeated in a loud voice in the Public Assembly so that the said Brother Michael Angelo de Caravaggio being personally summoned once, twice, thrice and a fourth time, on abundant notice, did not appear nor as yet does he appear, therefore the same Brother Michael Angelo Merisi de Caravaggio, was by the Reverend Lords gathered together, all circumstances being well discussed and determined, according to the terms of the statute, a vote having been taken and no dissentients appearing, condemned to be deprived of his habit.

Thereupon a report was delivered to the illustrious and exalted Lord,...and on his ordering the aforesaid sentence to be put into full execution, the said Brother Michael Angelo Merisi de Caravaggio was in the Public Assembly by the hands of the Reverend Lord President deprived of his habit and expelled and thrust forth like

a rotten and fetid limb from our Order and Community.”<sup>lxii</sup> (*tanquam membrum putridum et foetidum ejectus et separatus fuit*).

Thus ended Caravaggio’s short adventure in Malta. Honoured with knighthood, the artist rose in prestige as he made new contacts in high places. But Caravaggio seems to have been his own worst enemy. He could not enjoy a normal quiet life for a long time. His genes were not bent that way.

Unfortunately his escape suddenly cut short his stay on the island of Malta, which could have been far more enriched with the artist’s works of art. Having said this, one should be more than satisfied with the number of paintings completed during such a short stay in Malta (less than 15 months): *St Jerome Writing* (St John’s Church, Valletta); the *Beheading of St John the Baptist* (St John’s Church, Valletta); the *Sleeping Cupid* (Palazzo Pitti); the *Knight of Malta* (Palazzo Pitti); the *Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt with a page* (Louvre); and, some<sup>lxiii</sup> say, the *Annunciation* (Nancy).

The sequence of these paintings is far from generally agreed to. Various writers have expounded a whole array of possibilities. There are no known documents which even minimally assist in solving the sequence problem. Writers disagree to a large extent. Some would date a painting as earliest Malta phase whilst others would date the same work latest Malta phase. Thus for example, C. Baroni dated the *Sleeping Cupid* to the very beginning of the Malta phase. E. Borea dates it between the *Beheading* and *St Jerome*, whilst D. Mahon dates it to the very end of the Malta phase.

As can be seen, the majority of the Malta paintings are situated outside Malta. The *Sleeping Cupid* was sent by Fra Francesco dell ‘Antella (the first owner) to his brother Nicolo` in Florence in 1609. The *Knight of Malta* probably reached the Medici Palace at the same time as the Pitti *Sleeping Cupid*,<sup>lxiv</sup> or perhaps with Cardinal Leopoldo’s acquisitions<sup>lxv</sup> or through the Antella Family.<sup>lxvi</sup> On 6 December 1696 the portrait was transferred to the Villa Poggio Imperiale. The *Grand Master Wignacourt with a page* is already referred to by John Evelyn on 1 March 1644 as hanging in the palace of Count Liancourt in Paris. The *Annunciation* was donated by Duke Henry II of Lorraine to the provincial primatial church of Nancy between 1608 and 1620.

The *Beheading* (the largest and the only signed painting by Caravaggio) was painted as an altarpiece for the Oratory of St John’s Church. It has never moved from its site except when it was stored safely during World War II and when it was sent for restoration in Italy. The *St Jerome Writing* was referred to by Bellori (1672) as hanging above the door (archway) in the Chapel of the Italian Langue in St John’s Church, Valletta. There it remained until it was housed in the museum of the same church in 1968. It was stolen on 29 December 1984 and retrieved on 4 August 1987. After its restoration in Italy it has been housed in the Oratory.

Each painting bears a different commission. The *Beheading* could have been the *passaggio* or passage fee for Caravaggio’s entry into the Order. The *St Jerome Writing* was either commissioned by or donated to Fra Ippolito Malaspina. In the latter case it

would have been a form of thanks for Malaspina's assistance in getting Caravaggio over to Malta or in the artist's attainment of knighthood. The *Sleeping Cupid* was either a commission by or a donation to Fra Francesco dell'Antella for assistance given to Caravaggio in joining the Order or travelling to Malta. *The Knight of Malta* (Fra Antonio Martelli) was probably commissioned by Fra Martelli himself before Caravaggio's expulsion from the Order and before Martelli's departure from the island of Malta. Probably it accompanied Martelli when he left Messina for Florence in 1609. The *Annunciation* is believed to have been commissioned directly from Caravaggio by Count de Brie, the natural son of Duke Henry of Lorraine, during his visit to Malta in early 1608; it could have been collected in July by Prince Francois of Lorraine when he visited Malta.

The face of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt was mistakenly recognised in some of the Malta paintings. Thus some writers have seen the Grand Master's face in the jailer in the *Beheading*. This, of course, is completely false. Besides the lack of similarity, can one really imagine the Grand Master allowing himself to be portrayed as a jailer ordering the beheading of the Order's patron St? Some have seen a resemblance to the Grand Master in the face of *St Jerome Writing*. Once again I disagree with this and feel convinced that this face resembles that of St Andrew in the *Crucifixion of St Andrew* (Cleveland). Naturally, the face of the Grand Master features in the *Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt with a page* though for some reason, Caravaggio does not portray the Grand Master in his true armour.

Caravaggio's paintings are dramatised by the use of strong chiaroscuro, creating effective contrasts. One also traces several strong contrasts in Caravaggio's life. Perhaps we should not be surprised that in Malta the artist was originally referred to as "*persona virtuosissima*" (a person of great virtue) by the Grand Master but was expelled just fifteen months later like a foetid and rotten limb ("*membrum putridum et foetidum*").

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<sup>i</sup> Ingrid D Rowland, 'The Real Caravaggio', in *From Heaven to Arcadia*, 2005, p.156.

<sup>ii</sup> Vittorio Sgarbi, *Caravaggio*, 2005, p. 21: "Nel silenzio e nella meditazione di quei giorni Caravaggio concepisce la sua opera piu` complessa e straordinaria, la *Decollazione del Battista*."

<sup>iii</sup> For a more detailed interpretation, see Philip Farrugia Randon, *Caravaggio, Knight of Malta*, 2004, pp. 196-199.

<sup>iv</sup> For difference between a normal *bando* and a *bando capitale*, refer to Philip Farrugia Randon, *Caravaggio, Knight of Malta*, 2004, pp. 24-26.

<sup>v</sup> "si dice che Ranuccio fusse creditore di X scudi del Pittore, quale sdegnato seco andava procrastinando di dargli sodisfattione..." (Archivio Segreto del Vaticano, Avvisi, 2, 1606, fol. 143v., 31 May 1606), See Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, London, 1983, p.206, n.3.

<sup>vi</sup> Maurizio Marini, 'Michelangelo da Caravaggio in Sicilia', in *Sulle orme di Caravaggio: tra Roma e Sicilia*, Palermo, 2001, p.19, n.23

<sup>vii</sup> This pro-French allegation suffers when one keeps in mind that in his escape Caravaggio settled in Naples, which was under Spanish rule. Furthermore, the Sforza Colonna family who assisted Caravaggio in several instances were pro-Spanish.

<sup>viii</sup> For an exhaustive list of Caravaggio's breaches of the law, see Philip Farrugia Randon, *Caravaggio, Knight of Malta*, 2004, p.17, n.3.

<sup>ix</sup> For several reports, see Philip Farrugia Randon, *Caravaggio, Knight of Malta*, 2004, p.19, n5.

<sup>x</sup> Caravaggio carried this baggage of fears with him even in his late Sicilian stay. See Francesco Susinno, *Le vite de' Pittori Messinesi*, MS dated 1724, first published by Valentino Martinelli, Florence, 1960. "molte volte andava a letto vestito e col pugnale al fianco che mai lasciava."

<sup>xi</sup> Probably, the Sforza Colonna provided the artist a much needed cover.

<sup>xii</sup> John Azzopardi, 'Caravaggio in Malta: An unpublished document', in *The Church of St John in Valletta 1578-1978*, pp. 16-20. See Archives of the Inquisition of Malta (AIM), *Processi*, vol. 28, ff.295, 296.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Maurizio Calvesi, *Le Realta' del Caravaggio*, Turin, 1990, pp. 134-136. See also my reasoning in Philip Farrugia Randon, *Caravaggio, Knight of Malta*, 2004, pp.43-44, n.8.

<sup>xiv</sup> AOM, 1385 (1606), Correspondence Wignacourt, f. 104r.-v.

<sup>xv</sup> AOM, Arch. 1388 (1609), f.279v., f. 280r.-v.

<sup>xvi</sup> Stefania Macioce, 'Caravaggio a Malta e i suoi referenti: notizie d'archivio', in *Storia dell'Arte*, no. 81, 1994, n39, p.220.

<sup>xvii</sup> Giacomo Berra, *Il Giovane Caravaggio in Lombardia*, 2005, pp. 315 et seq.

<sup>xviii</sup> AOM, *Liber Conciliorum*, Arch. 101, f. 237.

<sup>xix</sup> AOM, *Liber Conciliorum*, Arch. 101, f. 237-238v.

<sup>xx</sup> Giacomo Berra, *Il Giovane Caravaggio in Lombardia*, 2005, pp.116 et seq.

<sup>xxi</sup> AOM, Arch., 1385, f.209 r.-v. See also Macioce, *Michelangelo da Caravaggio, Fonti e Documenti 1532-1724*, entries 284, 286, 288. Giacomo Berra also shows that the Marchesa had also travelled with her son Fabrizio on the Order's galley from Genoa to Naples, *Il Giovane Caravaggio in Lombardia*, 2005, p. 332.

<sup>xxii</sup> L. Spezzaferro, 'The documentary findings: Ottavio Costa as a patron of Caravaggio', in *The Burlington Magazine*, 1974, CXVI, 859, pp. 579-586.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Luigi Spezzaferro, 'Ottavio Costa e Caravaggio: certezze e problemi', in *Novita' sul Caravaggio*, Mia Cinotti ed., 1975, pp. 103-118.

<sup>xxiv</sup> John T. Spike favours the Costa link. "Ottavio Costa...was certainly involved." *Caravaggio*, 2001, p.178.

<sup>xxv</sup> Bartolomeo Dal Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione Militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano, detta di Malta*, Verona, 1703, vol.1, Book VIII, pp.441-443.

<sup>xxvi</sup> AOM, Arch. 1386 (1607), f. 24v.

<sup>xxvii</sup> AOM, 1390 (1611), f. 223r.-v.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Casa Buonarroti, filza 105, Letter from Francesco Buonarroti to Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, f.24r.

<sup>xxix</sup> AOM, 1392 (1613), f. 466r. "...voi non sarete gia' mai ricerca da loro per via di querela o processo, ne qui in Malta ne in altro luogo per quello che segue tra voi et il defunto Cavalier Bains loro fratello."

<sup>xxx</sup> Keith Sciberras, 'Riflessioni su Malta al tempo di Caravaggio', in *Paragone/Arte*, Year LII, Third series, No. 44(629), July 2002.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Mario Buhagiar, *The Iconography of the Maltese Islands 1400-1900: Painting*, Malta, 1987.

<sup>xxxii</sup> AOM, Arch. 1386, ff. 323-324r.; see also Stefania Macioce, 'Un Cavaliere Magistrale', in *Art e Dossier*, no. 85, December 1993, pp. 19-21 and 'Caravaggio a Malta e i suoi referenti: notizie d'archivio', in *Storia dell'Arte*, no. 81, 1994, pp.207-228.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> AOM, Arch. 1386, f.324v.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Secreteria Brevium*, vol. 428, f. 365r. John Azzopardi, 'Caravaggio's admission into the Order', in *Caravaggio in Malta*, Philip Farrugia Randon ed., Malta, 1989

<sup>xxxv</sup> Stefania Macioce, 'Un Cavaliere Magistrale', in *Art e Dossier*, no. 85, December 1993, pp. 19-21.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> For a detailed and reasoned account of this incident, see Philip Farrugia Randon, *Caravaggio, Knight of Malta*, 2004, pp.94 et seq.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Secreteria Brevium*, 428, f.364r.and v., f. 367r.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> AOM, vol.456, *Liber Bullarum*, 1607-1609, f. 282r.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Vertot, *The History of the Knights of Malta*, vol. 2, Appendix: 'The Old and New Statutes of the Order of St John of Jerusalem' (originally published in London in 1728) facsimile edition, 1989, Malta, p.14. Henceforth references to the statutes as quoted from Vertot will be referred to as: 'Vertot, *The Statutes*'

<sup>xl</sup> Vertot, *The Statutes*, p.49, Rule 5, Title VI, 'Of the residence to be kept by such as are to be admitted to sit in the chapter, or in any other council'.

<sup>xli</sup> Vertot, *The Statutes*, p. 122.

<sup>xlii</sup> Vertot, *The Statutes*, and p.13: Rule 16, Title V, 'Of the Common Treasury'.

<sup>xliii</sup> For a fuller treatment, see Philip Farrugia Randon, *Caravaggio, Knight of Malta*, 2004, pp. 78-79.

<sup>xliv</sup> Vertot, *The Statutes*, and p.19: Rule 2, Title III, 'The Church'.

<sup>xl</sup> Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, et architetti*, Rome, 1642, pp.136ff.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, Rome, 1672, pp. 201ff.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Francesco Susinno, *Le vite de' pittori Messinesi*, MS dated 1724, first published by Valentino Martinelli, Florence, 1960.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Keith Sciberras, 'Frater Michel Angelus in tumultu: the cause of Caravaggio's imprisonment in Malta', in *The Burlington Magazine*, April 2002, no. 1189, vol. CXLIV.

<sup>xl</sup> AOM. *Liber Conciliorum* 1606-08, fol. 126r.

<sup>i</sup> Giovanni Bonello, 'Caravaggio: Friends and Victims in Malta', in *Histories of Malta, Ventures and Adventures*, volume 6, pp.67 et seq.

<sup>ii</sup> Giovanni Bonello, 'Caravaggio: Friends and Victims in Malta', in *Histories of Malta, Ventures and Adventures*, volume 6, pp.67 et seq.

<sup>iii</sup> The discovery was made by Mgr. John Azzopardi during the dismantling of the organ which was about to be restored.

<sup>liii</sup> AOM Arch. 103, *Liber Conciliorum*, 1608-1610, f. 13v.

<sup>liv</sup> For a more detailed treatment of the *guva*, refer to Philip Farrugia Randon, *Caravaggio, Knight of Malta*, 2004, pp.121-123.

<sup>lv</sup> H. G. Bowerman, *The History of Fort St Angelo*, Malta, 1947.

<sup>lvi</sup> Thus in the case of Clement West in 1533, the imprisonment in a dungeon was changed to the whole castle of St Angelo. A. Mifsud, *Knights Hospitallers of the Venerable Tongue of England*, p. 181.

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- <sup>lvii</sup> Giovanni Bonello, 'In and out of the knights' prison: Escaping from prison 1530-1600', in *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 17 November 2002.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Edward Sammut, 'The trial of Caravaggio', in *The Church of St John in Valletta 1578-1978*, John Azzopardi ed., Malta, 1978, p. 24.
- <sup>lix</sup> Bassani and Bellini, *Caravaggio Assassino*, pp. 68-69.
- <sup>lx</sup> AOM, Arch., *Liber Conciliorum*, 1608-1610, f.32v.
- <sup>lxi</sup> Vertot, *The Statutes*, p. 104.
- <sup>lxii</sup> AOM, Arch., 103, *Liber Conciliorum*, 1608-1610, f.34r.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Roberto Longhi, Maurizio Calvesi (though he retains the Sicily possibility), Keith Sciberras.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> M. Marini, 'Tre proposte per il Caravaggio meridionale', in *Arte Illustrata*, IV, nn. 43, 44.
- <sup>lxv</sup> M. Chiarini, 'La probabile identita` del Cavaliere di Malta di Pitti' in *Antichita` Viva*, XXVIII, pp.15, 16.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Meloni Trkulja, 'Per l'Amore Dormiente del Caravaggio', in *Paragone*, XXVIII, n.331, September pp. 46-50.